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SUBJECT: PAKTIKA PROVINCE: SECURITY CHALLENGES HINDER
HEALTH CARE, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Summary

1. (SBU) Declining security in the second half of 2008 in Afghanistan's Paktika province affected residents, access to health care, education and employment opportunities in large parts of the province. Exceedingly low levels of education, combined with limited means of information and communication, restricted public awareness and civic engagement. Despite growing markets in the largest population centers, lack of employment opportunities continued to drive young men abroad, and economic activity was oriented toward Pakistan, especially in the border districts.

Medical Services Available to Many, but Limited

2. (U) Basic health services are available to many, but not all, residents of Paktika. In November a new PRT-built hospital opened in Orgun, Paktika's largest town. A number of clinics in the province continued to provide basic health services such as vaccinations, family planning, maternal health care, and tuberculosis treatment. The PRT plans to establish in 2009 a women's health and training center in Sharana that will expand services for women and provide a setting for local training of midwives. This service is badly needed, as Paktika has no female doctors and midwife positions are understaffed around the province.

3. (SBU) Security problems hampered some health projects in 2008. For example, USAID cancelled plans to construct twenty-bed hospitals in Bermel and Waza Khwa districts because poor road security prevented the contractor from beginning construction. USAID has recently agreed, however, to build a similar-sized hospital in Khair Kot, provided security conditions in that district do not deteriorate. NGOs operating clinics in Paktika reported difficulty delivering supplies and equipment to their clinics because of road security. In September, the entire medical staff of Sharana hospital submitted a joint resignation letter, complaining that they would quit their jobs unless security improved on the Sharana-Ghazni road. This action followed attacks on three members of the medical staff on this road earlier in the month. Following discussion of the problem between the PRT and then-Governor Khpallwak, the medical staff withdrew its resignation threat; provincial officials say security of the road has improved since this episode.

Many Schools Closed for Security Reasons

4. (SBU) According to Provincial Education Director Hafizullah, schools were closed during the second half of 2008 in Naka, Dila, and Khushamond districts because of

insecurity, and Gomal district was considering closing its schools. A limited number of schools were functioning in Terwa and Wor Mamay districts because of Taliban threats, with teachers warned of consequences if they did not limit themselves to teaching only the Quran. Insurgents in these two districts have also posed as teachers in order to collect salaries from GIROA. In September the Taliban attacked the girls' school in Sar Hawza, resulting in its closure; and school supplies were burned at another school in Sar Hawza built by the PRT. In Ziruk district, four out of 10 schools were operating. Bermel district leaders told PRT in October that only four of 28 schools were open; and the Bermel education director was kidnapped and decapitated by the Taliban in September.

15. (U) Schools around the province faced a lack of qualified teachers because of a combination of poor security conditions and the overall low educational level of the province. The provincial department of education had adequate books for Paktika's schools for grades one through six, but the lack of transportation assets and insecurity prevented their delivery to some areas. Adequate books for higher grades were not supplied by the Ministry of Education. Despite these challenges, numerous schools constructed or supported by the PRT were functioning, and the Provincial Governor and Provincial Development Council continued to request additional schools. A teachers training college built by the PRT in Orgun opened in early 2008 and was functioning in the second half of the year.

Lack of Media Complicates Public Communications

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16. (U) Government officials' means for conveying their messages through the media remained limited. Paktika has no television coverage, and no newspapers are printed or distributed in the province. The only print media is the "Ghatul" ("Tulip") magazine, which published only two issues in 2008 because of lack of printing facilities. There was no cell phone coverage outside the largest population centers and part of the corridor connecting them, and no internet cafes or other means of internet access. The chief means of outside communication for most residents outside the main population centers was telephone call shops in some district bazaars. The main source of public information remained radio: two FM stations in Sharana and "radio in a box" stations provided by CF in several districts. While still in office, Governor Khpalwak (who was replaced as governor in February 2009) used the existing local media, as well as national and international media, to convey strong pro-CF messages in response to events.

While Major Bazaars Grow, Poverty and Unemployment Fuel Instability

17. (U) Growth of the bazaars in Sharana and Orgun continued in the second half of 2008. However, economic isolation stemming from lack of infrastructure as well as insecurity continued to drive Paktika's economic alignment toward Pakistan, particularly in the five border districts. Many goods for sale in Paktika's bazaars came from Pakistan. In much of Paktika, Pakistani rupees and U.S. dollars were more widely used than Afghanis. The absence of banks in Paktika also continued to contribute to the use of rupees, as no formal structure existed for the distribution of the national currency to the province. The possibility of cell-phone banking services could fill a much needed financial services void for residents of Paktika's population centers where cell phone coverage exists.

18. (SBU) Then-Deputy Governor Mohammad Malik Tanai told PRT in October that at least half of Paktika's security problems stem from unemployment, with insecurity, poverty, and

unemployment acting in a self-reinforcing cycle. Provincial Council Chairman Nawab Waziri estimated that 95 percent of Paktika's families have at least one member working outside Afghanistan, typically in Pakistan, Iran, UAE, or India. These young men working abroad can be vulnerable to radical religious influences and enemy recruitment. Provincial leaders believe that providing employment opportunities for young men would reduce labor-related emigration, increase community involvement in development, and foster trust of GIROA among the people. Ongoing construction trades training workshops carried out on FOB Sharana by Task Force Castle are helping to develop a skilled workforce, but more such efforts are needed.

19. (SBU) Comment: Paktika exemplifies the vicious cycle that now pertains in many provinces)- today,s level of insecurity makes it difficult to address the lack of basic government services, ignorance and employment opportunities that are at the base of a good measure of the insurgency.
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